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ABSTRACT

As community college learning resource centers deal more with student instruction, librarians are gaining credence as true educators. In an effort to reinforce library usage and understand teaching faculty constraints, some librarians--many of them teaching "drop-outs"--have returned to the classroom. This paper describes the experiences of one librarian as an English instructor teaching the term paper unit. In addition to recommendations on the more effective means of research and term paper methods, alternative forms of research projects such as non-print presentations are suggested. Librarians are encouraged to make available their subject and library expertise by involving themselves in classroom teaching. (Author)

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LIBRARIAN IN THE CLASSROOM

by

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Librarian in the Classroom

"I didn't realize there were so many resources in this library!" the student exclaimed as she eagerly checked out books, magazines, pamphlets, and cassettes dealing with the subject for her business term paper. "For instance." she continued, "I didn't know how simple it was to find magazine articles on my topic. Thank you so much!"

I smiled smugly, satisfied with myself for broadening another student's interest and making life easier for her. "Well, you would have learned a. of this in the English term paper course anyway. You're just ahead of the game."

The student looked stunned and blurted, "But I just completed that course last quarter!"

After I had recovered from the blow, I further questioned the student to determine where the library and this "service" course had gone wrong. The student had indeed received the standard library orientation but admitted to being less than attentive since the subject of her research paper was to be a biography, and she had already chosen to write about her grandmother. She used letters, interviews, snapshots, and other primary sources in developing her paper, but when confronted with term papers in business, sociology, history and economics, the research skills she had learned in her English course were of little or no use. This situation placed a burden on other subject matter instructors who

assumed that their students were prepared for research assignments and on the librarians who discovered a multitude of students in the same predicament who would need to be taught one-by-one about library resources. Since individualized instruction is ideal, the library staff has provided audio and visual point of use tools for student self-help, but we have been shown that students still prefer human assistance. Help is freely and cheerfully offered by our reference librarians, but our staff is too small to reach each student effectively. After learning further that additional sections of the English term paper course were also assigning biographies which they felt were viable forms of research because of the multiple options and the recent interest in genealogy, I resolved that I had to get into a classroom.

I could see in bold letters the title of a recent article by Robert Vuturo: THOSE WHO CAN, MUST TEACH.[1] As a former high school English teacher, I had the experience but had become a "teaching dropout". Although I technically was required to hold a master's degree in English in order to teach in this community college, the administration assured me that my M.L.S. would suffice. In fact, Mr. Vuturo had predicted that the onus for change in improved academic library instruction would fall upon the administrators in hiring librarians anxious to reenter the classroom and in fostering staff attitudes conducive to librarians' total involvement in the instructional program.[2] Fortunately I was graced with blessings from the provost, the class roll from

the division chairman, and the release time from the library director. I ventured into the classroom as an English instructor who happened to be a librarian teaching a course on research and development of the term paper. Just the idea of this combination may have spurred more than one student into learning the library resources more thoroughly than usual since his grade was coming from the book dispenser herself.

Since I had free reign in this course, I offered the students free choice of topics with the exception of literary subjects as they are routinely covered in the third quarter of English. Ironically, only one student selected a biographical subject, and he encountered a bit of difficulty in discovering a new slant or unique idea about his character. To create an even more unusual term paper class, I allowed the students the option of a researched media project in lieu of the traditional paper. Anyone selecting the non-print alternative received instruction, advice, equipment, and materials from the audio-visual department and was required to perform standard research, exhibit an understanding of footnoting and its format, and submit a written script with bibliography. And so the quarter commenced with keen expectations from both sides.

The only available comparisons of my progress were with two other sections of the same course offered the same quarter on our campus, but unfortunately, the three classes differed significantly in time and length of meetings, average student age, student goals and ambitions, teaching styles, and class assignments. The only constant was I, the librarian who instructed each class in library

orientation, wrote and offered to each a multi-page term paper booklet highlighting resources available in our library, and developed and administered a post-test on the microfiche catalog and Readers' Guide (a pair of research basics). Even so, because of the variables, no valid conclusions could be reached from the disparate data. However, through observation of the other two classes, discussions with their instructors, and meetings with my students for ten weeks in the classroom and in the library, I believe I am equipped to propose valid recommendations for future sections of this term paper course and for nonteaching librarians as well:

1. The term paper topic should be the choice of the student. Especially when students are experiencing the research trauma for the first time, the task is more palatable if their efforts are self-serving. For those students professing no general interest in any area, librarians/teachers might encourage current events or social problems which so pervade the literature. In the case of the several instructors on our campus who routinely assigned biographies as the subjects of the papers, their idea of primary source research is to be commended, but the students did not necessarily pursue this fully and still managed to avoid learning more standard forms of library research as well.

2. The information covered in a library orientation should be approached from the viewpoint of student need and success. Give specific examples of how and why these library tools would be helpful in researching and writing his paper. Perhaps a two or threefold approach to the most commonly used resources is most successful: in-class general explanation of the item by the

instructor or the librarian, show-and-tell or hands-on orientation of the item in the library, and a reminder brochure or booklet for later use. Pat Breivik who has had much success with library instruction suggests emphasis on the type of information available rather than on specific titles.[3] Once students are convinced that these tools will be beneficial to them not only for this course but for future ones as well, they will become a captive audience.

3. Likewise, the items presented in a library orientation should have immediate practical application to the student's writing assignment. The student mentioned at the beginning of this paper had been given a thorough library orientation, but it was irrelevant to her term project. Instructors and librarians (if not one and the same) need to discuss the course's goals and objectives and content in relation to the library's role and develop instruction accordingly. If never given any positive reinforcement, some students might be subjected to orientations repeatedly and still be unable to function in the library independently. In order to alleviate this situation, quizzes are often inflicted upon students. These may be informative to the instructor, but they have a negative impact upon the students and their attitude towards the library. Similarly, "treasure (trivia) hunts" may seem fascinating to the instructor, but they are often frustrating and frequently irrelevant to the student. There is a definite need for communication between teacher and librarian in order for valuable library instruction to occur without penalizing the student.

4. Students should be permitted an alternate medium in which to

present their research findings. A student can produce a film and in the process learn something about photography, interviewing, writing scripts, editing films, narrating, and assembling an AV package along with the subject matter. This recommendation is made on the basis of the success of three student projects and their acceptance as alternative learning modes in other classes. A 25 minute slide/cassette program entitled Dali: Madman or Genius was shown again in an art class; a 20 minute super-8 sound film on Deaf Awareness was rerun in a sociology class; and a 15 minute slide/cassette presentation about Loneliness was delivered to a psychology class. The projects were all originally presented to the English class and were judged on research, organization, support of thesis, bibliography and footnote format, and clear communication to an audience. Since all of the students were older, they did not have the media background of the new crop of high school and young college students, and in each case this was the student's first experience in assembling a program although each had worked minimally with his medium before. The scripts and storyboards were checked as rough drafts for writing ability. Generally, the students who had some difficulty in written communication opted for the mediated approach; however, students with the most writing difficulties either dropped the course or chose the written route ultimately. Even though the media project entailed more hours than the written paper, all three students were enthusiastic about the prospect of repeating the endeavor. The only drawbacks in this proposal were the size and limitations of the audiovisual services on our campus, but unbelievable productions could be created in larger departments or in self-

service media laboratories as described by Ruth Stiehl.[4]

An adjunct concern to the above is the wealth of non-print resources available to students which goes unused because of student ignorance and/or incompetence. In a time of increased media coverage of events and of required accountability for budget maintenance, it is vital to the students as well as to the librarians that the library and its support services be used to capacity. Too often students are unaware that filmloops, transparencies, slides, cassettes, and so forth are housed in our newfangled libraries, and that they can be used successfully for research projects as well as for entertainment. The adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" is particularly cogent in this case.

The most critical element of this entire experiment is the cooperation and articulation between the librarians and the instructors. This understanding of one another's constraints should occur anyway, but when a librarian doubles as instructor, she becomes more acutely aware of student limitations and needs, administrative red tape, and faculty workload. For the same reason that school administrators have been urged to return to the classroom, even for only one course, to stay in touch, I encourage all librarians to become actively involved in library instruction outside of the library. Delegate some of your library duties to staff members who will welcome the increased responsibility and go into the classroom to teach one unit on library usage, a whole course on library orientation, or any course for which you are qualified and which could benefit by your bibliographic expertise as well.

Footnotes

[1]Robert Vuturo, "Beyond the Library Tour: Those Who Can, Must Teach," Wilson Library Bulletin, 51 (May 1977), p. 736.

[2]Ibid, p. 739.

[3]Patricia Senn Breivik, "Resources: The Fourth R," Community College Frontiers, Winter 1977, p. 49.

[4]Ruth E. Stiehl, "A New Look for the Old Term Paper," Audiovisual Instruction, March 1976, pp. 72-73.

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